Reconciling Creation: Spirit, Salvation, and Ecological Degradation

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Introduction[1]

In *City of God*, St. Augustine describes what he considered a noticeable aspect of new creation—a realm distinctively liberated from fragmentation, disintegration, and depravity and into an idyllic space of peace, reconciliation, and at-one-ness. This eschatological reconciliation, in Augustine's mind, will be a kind of "perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another."[2] This final reconciliation, no doubt, is one few would deny longing for. With proliferated political extremism, societal fragmentation, expressive individualism, ecological disaster, greed, selfishness, sexual impropriety and the like ruling and reigning in amidst our cultural moment, one most certainly longs for Augustine's dream.

But a fleshed-out theology of reconciliation is more challenging to realize than first blush lets on. While one may long for Paul's "reconciliation of *all* things" (Col. 1:20; italics mine), this reconciliation may prove equally frightening to imagine. How could an oppressed person long for a world in which they are reconciled to their oppressor?[3] How could a victim of sexual trauma imagine reconciliation to the one who traumatized them? Can slave owners and slaves truly be made right through Christ's blood? Why would a murderer desire to spend eternity with the one they murdered? Reconciliation should not be seen as some boutique theology that serves to only sentimentally warm the souls of suburbanites and the middle class in Sunday homilies—reconciliation is, also, the inbreaking of the unimaginable for those with unimaginable wounds. This is captured best by Karl Barth's reported answer to the question "will I see my loved one's in heaven?":

> Not *only* your loved ones![4]

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[1] This article was written with the assistance of my research assistant, Jared Dodson, who's careful eye and attention helped this paper along the way. His help was very important.

[2] Augustine, "City of God," in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oakes (New York: Random House, 1948), 17.

[3] This particular difficult theme of reconciliation theology is best explored in Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

[4] As quoted in Volf, Miroslav, "The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (January 2000): 91.

The eschatological reconciliation—empowering and inspiring as they may be—may likely terrify many on some level. Reconciliation will be hard. This is why Peter Hocken has gone so far as to suggest that the Spirit can even cover long-lost wounds such as between Jews and Christians.[5] Reconciliation heals in the present; and also the past. George Caird once observed that those most hostile to each other in the first century world of Jesus—Roman rulers and Jewish religious leaders—found an ironic common ground in their desire to silence and kill a Jewish peasant who claimed to be Messiah—Jesus.[6] Even the enemies of Christ reconcile to one another around him.

The reconciliation between humans is well-trodden theological ground. But one particular dimension of the Spirit's reconciliatory work that has often escaped attention is that of how humans are reconciled to an ecological world that has been held in "bondage" (Rom. 8:21) to its rebellion to God. What might reconciliation look like between human and non-human creation? This article will identify pertinent key pneumatological themes regarding reconciliation with particular reference to the created order to help develop a constructive theology which seeks to reimagine the Spirit's role in the reconciliation between human and non-human creations.

1. Holy Spirit as Reconciler

Indeed, one core theme of Christ's life, death, and resurrection was that of a ministry of reconciliation. Thus, for good reason, contemporary theologies of reconciliation are often centered within a Christological framework. As Kenan Osborn has written, "Every page of the New Testament speaks of reconciliation. The words of Jesus, his actions, his cures—a betoken reconciliation. From the New Testament period onward, the Christian tradition has understood the message of Jesus as a message of reconciliation."[7] The cross is the place of humanity's reconciliation to God—and each other. But there remains, as well, a seemingly quieter pneumatological aspect of reconciliation discernable throughout the biblical witness. In sum, the Spirit's work in mediating Christ's reconciliatory ministry can be identified on three distinct levels; the Holy Spirit fleshes out the work of the cross by reconciling (1) humans to God, (2) humans to humans, and (3) humans to non-human creation.

God's Spirit, first, mediates reconciliation between humans and God. Following the cosmic rebellion of Genesis 3, God begins to inaugurate a restoration of lost intimacy with humanity. Healing this severed relationship, broadly speaking, becomes the vexing problem the remainder of the Old Testament seeks to address. How can sinful and unholy creatures be restored to union

[5] Peter Hocken, *Azusa, Rome, and Zion: Pentecostal Faith, Catholic Reform, and Jewish Roots* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 21–22.

[6] Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: WJK, 2004), 25.

[7] Kenan B. Osborne, *Reconciliation and Justification: The Sacrament and Its Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 15. This quote was pointed out in the unpublished dissertation of Doug Bursch, "Angry Polarizing People: Social Media Polarization and the Ministry of Reconciliation" (Newberg, OR, George Fox University, 2019).

with a perfect and holy God? To that end, both Tabernacle and Temple spaces serve as Yahweh's short-term response to mitigate this fracture by concretizing sacred space wherein "cohabitation" could once again take place. Sacred spaces like these, thus, become locations wherein architecture and sanctification appear to overlap. "The increasing sanctification of the three areas of the tabernacle," observes Sandra Richter, "all communicate the same message: the Holy One is here."[8] The cohabitation of God and humanity in these dwellings (Hb. *shkn*) becomes a kind of framework to understand the Holy Spirit among his people later in the biblical record.

In the new covenant, humans are reconciled to God through Christ's work on the cross. But this is a Trinitarian work. Following Christ's ascension, the Spirit begins concretizing Christ's reconciliatory work in the world and the church. God, indwelling the believer by the Spirit, once again communicates, abides, and empowers humanity with "wordless groans." (Rom. 8:26) In what has often been called the "covenant of redemption" in Reformed traditions, the intra-trinitarian efforts of the Father, Son, and Spirit correspondingly bear a ministry of increased reconciliation. Creating together, they reconcile together. The Spirit appropriates—in Paul Jacobs words— "the effective presence of the triune God in the life of the congregation as well as in the life of its members."[9] Eden's lost intimacy is being restored. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Spirit bookends creation and new creation by hovering over the chaos (Gen. 1:2) and inviting creation toward Jesus (Rev. 22:17).[10] The Spirit is the "uniting" principle bridging creation and new creation.[11]

Thus we approach, secondly, the sociological work of the Spirit's work in the New Testament. Humans are reconciled to God; *and* they are reconciled to each other. Scripture tethers the Spirit to inter-human healing most clearly in Pauline literature. Praying that the Colossians might "be filled with all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives," Paul describes Christ as "reconciling to himself all things...making peace through his blood" (Col. 1:9; 19, 20). To the Corinthians, Paul mentions the "deposit of the Spirit" before outlining Christ's reconciliation that is to be fleshed out among the church (2 Cor. 5:16-21). In both instances, Paul envisions the Spirit as what makes healed human relations possible. The sociological dimensions of the Spirit are noteworthy: one's acceptance by God leads to acceptance of the diversity of the other (Rom.

[8] Sandra L. Richter, "What Do I Know of Holy? On the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in Scripture," in *Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in the Community of Faith*, ed. Jeffrey W. Barbeau and Beth Felker Jones (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 29.

[9] Paul Jacobs, *Theologie Reformierter Bekenntnisschriften in Grundzügen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959), 99.

[10] Leonard Sweet, *New Life in the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 18.

[11] Oliver Crisp, "Uniting Us to God: Toward a Reformed Pneumatology," in *Spirit of God: Christian Renewal in the Community of Faith*, ed. Jeffrey W. Barbeau and Beth Felker Jones (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 92–109.

15:7). Mysteriously, the Spirit creates both diversity—and unity—within the church; or, what Pope Francis has called the "reconciled diversity."[12]

In this vein, consider the biblical interplay between Spirit and memory in Johannine literature. Here, the Spirit "brings to mind" that which Jesus taught (Jn. 14:26). Even human memory is a gift of the Spirit. Might we, then, not understand Jesus' injunction in Matt. 5:23-25 to leave one's gift at the altar if an offended brother is "remembered" to be part of the Spirit's reconciliatory call? Just as the Spirit "reminds" us of Jesus's words, the Spirit "reminds" us of unreconciled offenses. Rodolfo Estrada has masterfully examined the rich way Johannine pneumatology casts the Spirit's work to bridge cultural and ethnic divides in the earliest Christian communities.[13] No wonder Luke casts the shared Jew/Gentile mission in the context of the Spirit's descent in Acts 7.

There even appears, on some level, a clear message that the lack of reconciliation between one another can hinder the Spirit's work among God's people. The Samaritans in Acts 8:14-15 are reported to have "accepted the word of God." However, it is only *after* Peter and John lay their hands on the Samaritan believers that all present are filled with the Spirit. Oddly enough, the Spirit's anointing is withheld until a physical touch between the enemies of Jew and Samaritan has been undertaken. Likewise, it is only after Ananias lays his hands on Saul that the Spirit indwells Saul. Reconciliatory touch and Spirit baptism are, perplexingly, seemingly intertwined in the post-Pentecost church. This raises a serious question: if Jesus asked his disciples to leave *their* gift at the altar until reconciliation with an offended brother has taken place, will God leave part or all of *his* gift of the Spirit's gifting at the altar until steps toward reconciliation have been taken?

Indeed, as Frank Macchia has put it, "the community of the Spirit is a reconciled and reconcil*ing* community".[14] And so the pneumatological dimensions of human reconciliation are core to the witness of the New Testament. "It is the Spirit," once wrote Herman Bavinck, "that creates the new humanity where God's dwelling will be forever."[15] Indeed! These vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Spirit's reconciliation are the very framework we need to understand and imagine a healed world. It is that horizontal dimension (between God and human) that makes possible—in the words of Pope John Paul II—a "vertical thrust, directed toward the One, who, as

[12] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2013), 230.
[13] Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III, *A Pneumatology of Race in the Gospel of John: An Ethnocritical Study* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2019).
[14] Macchia, Frank D., "Baptism in the Holy Spirit-and-Fire: Luke's Implicitly Pneumatological Theory of Atonement," *Religions* 9, no. 2 (2008): 67. (Italics mine)
[15] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, trans. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), xxx.

the Redeemer of the world and the Lord of history, is himself our Reconciliation."[16] George Nalunnakkal has incisively fleshed this out:

> Reconciliation is also a horizontal phenomenon in that human beings are also called to reciprocate the divine initiative, and thereby reflect the same process of effecting reconciliation among human beings, and between humanity and non-human creation.[17]

It is Nulunnakkal's final point that brings us to our third dimension of reconciliation: the Spirit's reconciliation between humans and non-human creation. This particular theme is located most clearly in Isaiah 11:6-9 where the prophet envisions a soon-coming Spirit-anointed Messiah who would redeem and restore Israel. Here:

> The wolf will live with the lamb,
> the leopard will lie down with the goat,
> the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
> and a little child will lead them.
> The cow will feed with the bear,
> their young will lie down together,
> and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
> The infant will play near the cobra's den,
> and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
> They will neither harm nor destroy
> on all my holy mountain,
> for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
> as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah's beautiful vision, interestingly, connects the Spirit-anointed Messiah's ministry to the healing of the natural order. The reader must note: Isaiah's outline of unreconciled creatures lists predator after predator. In the natural world, wolves *eat* lambs; leopards *eat* goats; lions *eat* calves; and so on. These predatory opposites in the natural world would be caught dead in the presence of the other. However, when the Spirit-anointed Messiah appears, relationships of predation appear to be healed. It is this third and final dimension of the Spirit's work that we turn our attention.

2. Sin and Creation

What exactly needs reconciling? Has sin truly impacted the human relationship to non-human creation? These are critical questions. To my own befuddlement, for a myriad of reasons, a decade's span of ecotheological research has perpetually shown that Christians are readily willing

[16] John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1995), 35.

[17] George Mathew Nalunnakkal, "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to Be Reconciling and Healing Communities," *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (2005): 14.

to deny the realities of ecological degradation and climate change. In light of a robust historic Christian hamartiology, one is hard-pressed to understand the ecological crisis *outside* the framework of anthropocentrism, selfishness, and human depravity. Sin illuminates the very problems behind the anthropocentric eco-crisis. Dung beetles are not to blame for our current predicament. Humans are at fault. To say nothing of the fact, secondly, that the realities of the climate crisis offer an implied argument for transcendent purpose. Does not the very reality that the earth's ecosystem has ceased working the way it should provoke a subtle ontological argument that there is a particular way it is *supposed* to work?

Indeed, things are "not the way they are supposed to be."[18] And this very fact points to the reality that there *is* a way things are to be. It is through the doctrine of hamartiology that we not only can understand *why* humans are responsible for the ecological disaster, but also, for why things are not the way they were to be.

Broadly speaking, there remain two means by which human sin impacts non-human creation: via direct and systemic impacts. First, Scripture is replete with incidents highlighting creation experiencing injury by humans. But even further, the cadre of biblical injunctions to protect creation from human harm implies the problem: sinful humans need to curtail the harm they do to the physical environment in which they find themselves

To begin, the immediate impact of humanity's first sin is the Bible's first death—that of some unnamed animal—that is killed to provide the man and the woman their clothing (Gen. 3:21). In Genesis 9, God accommodates the eating of animals; but, with boundaries. They must not have their lifeblood. God, here, appears to undo the ancient practice of eating animals alive—something, no doubt, that causes great suffering to God's creatures. God even extends sabbath rest to animals (Ex. 20:8; 10). In war, Deuteronomy 20:19-20 commands that Israel is "not [to] destroy its trees by putting axes to them, because you can eat their fruit." Why? Various nations (such as the neo-Assyrians) were known for destroying all fruit trees in a conquered city as part of siege warfare.[19] Oxen are not to be muzzled while they tread out the grain (Deut. 25:4). "The righteous care," Proverbs 12:10 reads, "for the needs of their animals." So, it is no wonder Scripture furrows its brow that Balaam strikes his donkey three times in Numbers 22. Jesus embodies a deep compassion toward animals seeming to suggest that even an injured ox (like a child) was to be rescued if they fell into a pit on the Sabbath (Lk. 14:5). These stipulations are ecologically mindful and sensitive. But they also imply a vexing problem: post-Edenic humanity is bent on harming non-human creation.

[18] Plantinga, Cornelius, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[19] On siege warfare texts, see ch. 5 of Richter, Sandra L., *Stewards of Creation: What Scripture Says About the Environment and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000).

But this remains only one side of the problem. There is, similarly, systemic harm disproportionately leveraged on non-human creation. Here, the interwoven relationship between the personal and systemic cannot be overstated. Personal sin is never merely personal. Personal rebellion against God always creates a new social culture of blame, shame, and enslavement. As Genesis 3 reveals, there are *always* corporate dimensions to human sin. This includes the creation of a culture that is detrimental toward the earth. Michael Welker has spoken of sin in ecologically systemic terms:

> Sin is, rather, any action or any spreading infection of the sinner's environment which, beyond any immediate wrong that it does, destroys the foundations for positive behavior and prospects for changes in behavior and in the way influence is exercised. Sin perverts and destroys the forces that render possible a renewal of orientation, not only for the agent but also for the agent's environment.[20]

Sin nurtures a system; a system marked by undue and unneeded suffering. Holmes Rolston III—a Christian philosopher—has theologically connected these interwoven themes of sin, suffering, and predation within the animal kingdom by pointing to the white pelican. White pelicans typically lay two eggs—often the second being laid a few days following. Often, however, pelicans only parent one chick at a given moment. As the first pelican is born, they will eat the majority of the food that is present to them, begin to attack its siblings, and eventually shove them out of the nest. Almost always, the parent will refuse to help the second chick back into the nest leaving it to die from starvation and neglect. To biologists, it appears as though the second chick serves almost exclusively as a "backup chick" in case the first one dies. Rolston contends: "If God watches the sparrows fall, God must do so from a very great distance."[21]

Christopher Southgate has sought to address the problem Rolston's work raises by offering three "solutions" to the question of the system of suffering for the created order. First, the Thomist would say that the white pelican must reject a chick in order to live its God-created nature; suggesting that suffering is a part of God's natural order. Secondly, some would argue this is a clear sign that ours is a world shaped and bent by sin. For before the fall, these things would never have happened. Now, sin has created a world where there is not enough food for all pelicans. And, third, some contend that animals do not experience pain and thus their plight cannot be understood as suffering. Wherever one lands, Southgate rightly contends, we live in a "profoundly ambiguous world"; a "very good" (Gen. 1:31) world that is "groaning in labor pains" (Rom. 8:22).[22]

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[20] Michael Welker, "The Holy Spirit," *Theology Today* 46, no. 1 (1989): 13.

[21] Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion* (New York: Random House, 1987), 140; see also Jay B. McDaniel, *Of Gods and Pelicans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 19–21.

[22] Christopher Southgate, "How Could a Good God Create Nature Red in Tooth and Claw?" (Earth Day lecture at St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, April 22, 2013); see also Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (London: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 3–6.

Some, like Christopher Southgate, have gone so far as to suggest that in a world of evolution, suffering is part of the system. "There is no evidence," Southgate writes "that the biological world was ever free of predation and violence."[23] Rolston III has similarly argued that predation and ecological violence are part of the created world since its beginning—"yield[ing] a flourishing of species."[24] Both see the suffering produced by predation as essential parts of the natural order; a world in which "violence is the only way to give rise to the range of creatures that we see."[25] But, the difficulty lies in reconciling evolutionary predation such as that proposed by Rolston and Southgage with that of a biblical picture of a created world in Edenic harmony. Ned Hettinger has identified the pressure point of the conversation: "Predation has the same dialectical character as natural history: death and pain of one individual turns into life and pleasure for another, all the while advancing the system."[26] One who takes God's created world of *shalom* seriously would struggle greatly seeing *shalom* as necessary violence for the flourishing of creation.

Rather, there is the possibility that the White Pelican lives in a world where there is not enough food for both chicks. That is, for survival sake, sin has impacted the creation so powerfully that the mother bird even has to make the decision. In the end, there is legitimate reason to believe that human sin creates a context wherein the animal kingdom cannot fully live out its divine order received at the beginning of creation even before humanity's existence: "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22). For Hosea, not even the animals are left outside of covenantal relationship: "On that day, I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground" (Hos. 2:18). Human sin ultimately creates a culture wherein the animal kingdom is prevented from fulfilling its God-ordained assignment.

This dovetails quite interestingly with Paul's language in Romans 8 where one identifies three distinct "groanings:" the "whole creation" (v.22) groans under the travail of human sin and brokenness; "we ourselves" groan as humans awaiting our adoption (v.23); and the Spirit groans on our behalf (v. 28). Creation, humanity, and God—all groaning together in anticipation for the redemption that Christ is inaugurating. The systemic evil is so real the whole system groans. Barb Rossing has written forcefully that God himself groans through the environmental crisis, crying:

[23] Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation.*

[24] Holmes Rolston III. Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

[25] Janel Kragt Bakker. "Debunking 'Bambi Theology': An Interview with Christopher Southgate." *Bearings Online*, Collegeville Institute, 8 July 2016. collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/debunking-bambi-theology-interview-christopher-southgate/

[26] Ned Hettinger, "Valuing Predation in Rolston's Environmental Ethics: Bambi Lovers versus Tree Huggers" Environmental Ethics, no. 16 (1994): 17.

> [i]n a cosmic lament against the violent conquests and predatory economic system of the empire that has enslaved both people and nature.[27]

But the hope, for Paul, is the Spirit's bearing of increasing freedom to and within us, we live at peace with creation. The Spirit frees humans which, in the end, leads to the freedom of creation. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22-23).

Indeed, reconciliation is what all of creation longs for. Environmentalist Albert Schweitzer once lamented the violent nature of the animal kingdom by writing, "The world is indeed the grisly drama of will-to-live at variance with itself. One existence survives at the expense of another of which it yet knows nothing."[28] God, indeed, must have more in mind for creation than this.

3. The Spirit as Ecological Healer

It is important that our vision of the Spirit's reconciliatory ministry be necessarily extended both to a mitigation of human injury toward non-human creation, and also their relationship's eschatological healing. To do so, one critical point is to revisit God's relationship to the other-than-human parts of creation. Paul's language in Colossians 1:19-20 is instructive: "For in [Christ], all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." If "all things" (Gr. *ta panta*) on earth and in heaven are to be "reconciled" through the cross, this implies that Christ's work was a restoring work—or returning it to its original state. As Douglas Moo has pointed out, the phrase "making peace" echoes the Hebrew concept of *shalom* throughout Old Testament literature.[29] Reconciliation is not merely restored human peace to God. Reconciliation is the re-peace-ment of all of nature to God in new creation.

It is this holistic reconciliation, this future *shalom*, that the Spirit carries all of creation towards. Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia has rightly situated Pentecost as a key eschatological signal of the in-breaking of this new creation. Just as covenant people are indwelt by the Spirit, the Spirit indwelling, redeeming and sanctifying creation:

> Seen as an eschatological concept, Pentecost becomes a symbol, not only of the divine breath filling and charismatically empowering God's people, but also indwelling all of

[27] Barb Rossing, "God Laments with Us: Climate Change, Apocalypse and the Urgent Kairos Moment," *Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 2 (2010): 123.
[28] Albert Schweitzer. "The Ethic of Reverence for Life," in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989), 35.
[29] Douglas Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006): 472.

> creation on the day….The kingdom thus centrally involves but also transcends the church.[30]

Thus, the church's reception of the sanctifying power of the Spirit is simultaneously paralleled by "the final sanctification of creation."[31] In tandem, the Spirit fills the church in Acts 2:2-4 *and* "fills the universe" in Ephesians 4:10. Heaven is beginning to "come down" (Rev. 21:5, 10). Spirit baptism, as such, becomes the sprig of eschatological hope popping up through the concrete of sin signaling the spring of new creation.

Paul echoes this anticipation in Romans 8: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." (Rom. 8:19) Indeed, for Paul, all of creation shares in a longing for the day when the humans would be liberated by sonship. For in human liberation they find their liberation. Again, Macchia rightly connects the liberation of humans to the liberation of creation as a central ministration of the Spirit:

> God's rule will be accomplished not by enslaving creation, for this is the practice of the dark powers that he has come to overthrow. Jesus inaugurates God's rule by liberating people to righteousness in the realm of the Spirit. The righteousness of the kingdom reaches out especially to the weak and oppressed, to those who cry out for mercy and justice; it is present at that place of utter helplessness for all...[32]

The Spirit frees us from the pangs of sin; and the pains of a world marred by sin. The fires of the Spirit seek to upend and undo all the unreconciled evil that impacted human and non-human creation. In the history of the church, this is not all that odd. This parallels the monastic fathers' virtue of the "Adamic closeness" with the animals.[33] For many fathers, one could discern how close they were to God the Father by how close they were to the animal kingdom of this world. Intimacy with God necessarily reflected intimacy with God's creatures. This has been purportedly illustrated by the great 18th century preacher George Whitefield who reportedly told audiences that one could know how close one was to Jesus by whether the animals loved him or not:

> Dost thou know why the wild animals fear and growl and shriek at thee? Because they know thou hast a quarrel with their Master![34]

Apocryphal or not, these theological fragments illustrate a deeper dimension of the church's reflection on the Spirit's work. Shouldn't an encounter with the Holy Spirit lead us to a restoring

[30] Macchia, Frank D., *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 102–3.
[31] Macchia, Frank D., 86.
[32] Macchia, Frank D., *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 149.
[33] See, for instance, the tale of Stephen as recounted in John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Mahwah: Paulist, 1982), 141–42.
[34] Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (Philippsburg: P&R Publishing, 2015), 52. Sadly, Keller does not offer a citation for the quotation.

relationship with creation? Not only *should* it be; it becomes our very vocation. Notably, the first time anyone is "filled" with the Spirit in the Bible after the fall is Bezalel and Oholiam in Exodus. Their task? The weaving together of created things to construct a tabernacle worthy of the worship of the living God.[35] Their work is walking by the Spirit to bring creation together to worship the Creator—a miniature portrait of Eden in the creation of the tabernacle.

One is often struck at how few images of *shalom* between humans and non-human creation are found in Scripture. We see it in Eden. We see it in Revelation 4 and 5 wherein various "creatures" worship Jesus alongside humans around the throne. And we observe it in the flood narrative of Genesis 7-9 where animals and humans share a seeming vessel of salvation atop the coming deluge, existing in peace together.

Which brings our argument back to Isaiah's eschatological vision. The sign of the Spirit-anointed Messiah includes a world where predators are no longer acting as predators—*shalom*ing together once again. It most certainly cannot be mistaken, then, that as the Spirit-anointing Jesus ascends from the waters of baptism he is immediately led into the desert temptation by the Spirit. Mark makes an interesting observation. There, following his temptation, Jesus is "with the wild animals, and the angels attended him" (Mk. 1:13). In a dangerous desert of predators where wild animals eat humans, Jesus is *with* the wild animals. This, would strongly suggest, is the sign of the inaugurated kingdom of the Spirit-anointed Messiah who comes to make the world right. And what happens when that Spirit-anointed Messiah is here. Once again, the "wild animals" and humans can inhabit the same space in peace.[36]

Indeed, the Markan teaching about snake handling in the longer ending of Mark has wrongly been appropriated among Pentecostals.[37] The ability to "handle" snakes is not to be a literalistic liturgical invitation for church services. It is Mark's way of saying: Jesus has come. The Spirit has fallen. And one of the inaugural signs is that the enmity between humans and creation (even of snakes) is beginning to be undone. What was once a war is now coming to peace. Shalom is back.

[35] Richard Hess, "Bezalel and Oholiab: Spirit and Creativity," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, ed. Firth, David D. and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 161–72.

[36] Broadly, I follow the thinking of Richard Bauckham here in Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age," in *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3–21.

[37] Swoboda, A.J., *Tongues and Trees: Toward a Pentecostal Ecological Theology*, vol. 40, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2013).

In Christ's work, snakes and humans are liberated from their history of enmity.[38] The Adamic closeness is slowly being restored.

4. Fleshing Out Reconciliation

How does all of this impact the way we walk in the Spirit on this broken planet? Indeed, the power of walking in the Spirit should impact everything—nothing less than our relationship to the earth. Empirical evidence has shown that Spirit baptism can change the physical realm in tangible ways. In the Flame of Love Project, extensive research has been given to how Godly Love—or the experienced love of God as fleshed out in love between people—can be empirically discernable. This project shows that those who have claimed to have a Spirit baptism experience tend toward stronger relationships, higher levels of generosity, and more vibrant social environments.[39] But how can one's experience of the Holy Spirit lead to a transformed relationship to creation?

Three immediate dimensions of this come to mind. First, the Holy Spirit should awaken our ecological imagination. The appeal that is so easily felt when one witnesses the savage nature of the world is well encapsulated in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. In his book, Dostoevsky's character rejects God by "returning his ticket" due to the all-too-high price of harmony in the created world.[40] What has caused Dostoevsky's character, and Dostoevsky himself, to stumble in his faith is the idea that God could allow for so much suffering in the lives of people and animals alike. Yet, Dostoevsky poorly understood God's continual intercession on behalf of his creation and his vision for a redeemed creation. Whether poetic or literal, the biblical story of creation is one of a world in harmony. Additionally, the eschatological message of the prophets and of Revelation both demonstrate a return to this harmonic state. To better understand this in light of the natural order, we must look at the one who ordered it.

To do so, we must have a reordered way of thinking about the created realm. John's Revelation speaks of that eschatological event when the coming Kingdom is finally here. His description of the new heaven and new earth, interestingly, includes the creaturely realm: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power,

[38] I am not the only one to connect Mark 16. See J.T. Snell, "Beyond the Individual and into the World: A Call to Participation in the Larger Purposes of the Spirit on the Basis of Pentecostal Theology," *Pneuma* 14, no. 1 (1992): 43–57.

[39] Mark J. Cartledge, *Narratives and Numbers: Empirical Studies of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, vol. 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[40] Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Constance Garnett. Ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: Norton, 1976).

for ever and ever!'" (Rev. 5:13). Not only are animals present in John's vision of a future kingdom, but they are active in worship to the Father and the Son.

We are a community on earth. And we will be a community in heaven. Just as the Spirit leads all of groaning creation to its ultimate future, the Spirit awakens our minds to the things that are to come. And to live in an eschatological way in the Spirit today is to begin to live that which will come *now*. This renewal of imagination not only permits us—but requires us—to live with our pneumatological imaginations alive being aware that we must begin living the way we will for time and time again.

Second, the Holy Spirit revives our personal encounter and relationship with non-human creation. The Pentecostal theme of the laying on of hands is connected to this. In the laying on of hands, we return to intimacy, to touch, to relationship. Not only does the Spirit heal us *to* creation; we are healed *by* our reconnection to creation. The narrative of John 9 illustrates this poignantly. A blind man finds himself standing before the Spirit-anointed Messiah. What does Jesus do? He rubs his eyes with dirt and spittle. As one theologian has suggested, there are deep ecological undertones to this healing: "By applying mud to the man, Jesus refashioned him as an 'earthling' as he was at the time of his original creation. He was thus being brought back to his original oneness with nature. This...was truly an ecological healing."[41] From soil humans are created. And in the soil humans are healed. Jurgen Moltmann has written about the three moves of God's creative work: *creatio originalis, creatio continua,* and *creatio nova*.[42] That final, the "new creation," is being begun now. How? Through the indwelling work of the Spirit in the midst of the new creation.

Third, and finally, the Spirit gives us hope. But how? In her *A New Climate for Theology*, Sallie McFague deals with many issues relating to her ecotheology and attempts to "bring the church back down to earth."[43] McFague strikes a positive stance regarding the overall efforts of saving earth by governmental policy change, commenting "governments must force us to change the way we live, but we must elect legislators who will create the necessary regulations."[44] This is the power of the Spirit: the one who beckons us to act.[45] Identity, McFague contends, plays a massive role in ecological living. This is a church that has forgotten its identity in the world. Citing the

[41] Nalunnakkal, "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to Be Reconciling and Healing Communities," 19.
[42] Moltmann, Jurgen, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 206–8.
[43] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 32.
[44] McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 24–25.
[45] McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, 30–32.

twentieth-century French mystic Simon Weil, she suggests the catholicity (wholeness) of the Christian message is lost unless it includes all of creation, what she calls "ecological catholicity."[46]

Hope, then, is the work of the Spirit to bring hope in the midst of ecological catastrophe. Without the Spirit that brings hope, we lose all sense of motivation to act. Again, Welker sums this up:

> When Jesus cures the sick or drives out demons, he intercedes in situations in which we see ourselves condemned to helplessness and feel ourselves paralyzed; where patience is of no avail and time does not heal; where the empty phrases by which we seek to assuage and encourage stick in our through; where one lives between a sense of powerlessness and apathy and outbreaks of anxiety and despair.[47]

At one point in my work as an ecotheologian, I had the chance to meet with a young woman who identified as an atheist. I asked her: "why do you spend your life caring for this earth?" She did not have an answer. She just did. For a brief moment, I explored with her why I thought she cared: that she was created to. And that her built-in compassion was actually a sign of her Creator. She wept expressing to me the sadness she felt over how many environmentalists often took their lives. She said, "it is really hard doing this work of caring for the earth when you don't have hope."

Ours is a pneumatological hope. And by the power of the Spirit, we can do the work of caring for creation because the Creator who has asked us to do it will faithfully use our work. Of course, there is more. But these are good starting places. And no doubt inch us closer and closer to the eschatological kingdom that the prophet Isaiah dreamt of that would be fulfilled in Jesus.

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[46] McFague, 34. Weil originally wrote, "We have to be catholic, that is to say, not bound by so much as a thread to any created thing, unless it be to creation in its totality." For original text, see Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Putnam, 1951), 98.

[47] Welker, "The Holy Spirit," 13–14.

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